

## February 04, 2005- President Bush has a Great Opportunity to work for a brighter West Virginia

President Bush has a Great Opportunity to work for a brighter West Virginia with his New Budget - I hope the President Will Take this Opportunity

When President Bush announces his budget next week he has a great opportunity to work for a brighter West Virginia. In 2004 the budget did not provide enough funding for highways. It did not give any increases in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program for West Virginia. It did not fully fund our education system. The President's budget raised health care costs for veterans and took more money out of the pockets of hard working West Virginians and into the hands of HMO's. It also made cuts to many other programs that are important to West Virginia.

When the President announced the budget last year I said that we, as a Nation, can do better. A year has passed, many of the same issues are facing West Virginia and it is time again for the President's annual budget. Now he has the opportunity to keep the promises he has made and provide funding to West Virginia for many important projects and programs.

Last year the President undercut West Virginia's needs and job opportunities by calling for \$119 billion less for transportation than the amount his own U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) said is needed to address our Nation's infrastructure shortcomings over the next six years. The Transportation Bill we passed in the House allocated roughly \$2.2 billion for West Virginia projects, but the bill died because of Republican infighting.

The Transportation Bill will fund projects like the Coalfields Expressway, Route 10 in Logan County and the King Coal Highway. Not only will the \$2.2 billion that I helped secure for West Virginia improve our road system, it would also create jobs for our region. The USDOT estimates that 47,500 jobs are created for every \$1 billion invested in transportation. I believe Transportation in southern West Virginia - along with Technology and Tourism - represent the future of job growth in our economy. I encourage the President to acknowledge the needs of West Virginia's economy by requesting adequate funding for the Transportation Bill in his budget.

Another major part of our transportation system in West Virginia is our rail lines. Last year, President Bush proposed a \$325 million cut for Amtrak. Luckily in the Congress, thanks to Senator Robert C. Byrd, we were able to raise the funding for Amtrak and minimize cuts. However, I fear that this year the President will try to cut Amtrak's funding again and might cut all Amtrak funding. Many people across this Nation depend on Amtrak and more cuts to funding could cause bankruptcy, which would be a significant loss to West Virginia residents. The President has the opportunity to help all the people who rely on Amtrak.

During the last year, many former coal miners in West Virginia and across the region lost their health benefits due to a federal court ruling. A federal judge allowed Horizon Natural Resources to use bankruptcy loopholes to escape its obligations required under the Coal Act to provide health care benefits to its current and retired workers. Senator Rockefeller and I introduced legislation to close this bankruptcy loophole and protect workers' health benefits. The President can help the problem now by setting aside money in his budget to help pay for these lost benefits and I encourage him to do so.

This year's budget also needs to address Abandoned Mine Reclamation. Throughout Appalachia and other coal mining regions across the country there remains a high number of abandoned mine sites which endanger the public health and safety of those who live nearby. The President can request additional funding to combat this threat, but without new legislation the resources needed to secure public health will not be available.

President Bush needs to fully fund our education system this year. To protect our country in the future we must protect our education system today. The young people going through our public schools will soon be leading the Nation in Congress, the Military and the business world. You cannot run a first class Nation on a two bit education. I urge the President to help defend the future of America by fully funding education.

In addition to protecting the future of American security, the President also has the responsibility to protect the past defenders our country. Our budget for Veterans has decreased in recent years and we need to reverse that trend. Since 95% of the VA budget deals with healthcare, health benefits for veterans have taken the brunt of the impact. I introduced legislation that would expand pension benefits to those who served in war-like conditions and those who were awarded the expeditionary medal. The President's budget should lead the charge for our Veterans and it is my hope it will this year.

There are many other programs vital to Southern West Virginia that need to be recognized in President Bush's upcoming budget. A couple of the most important are the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA). The ARC and the EDA provide needed funding to many educational and economic development projects in Southern West Virginia that are important to the future of our area. These projects are vital to our communities as we strive to improve the quality of life in West Virginia.

I urge you Mr. President; work with West Virginia by requesting funding in your budget for the programs that are vital to the residents of the Mountain State.